



**ASIAN BUSINESS OWNERS**  
**from South Grand Boulevard's International District**  
**St. Louis, Missouri**

**a needs assessment**  
**preliminary report**

Submitted by  
**Pamela A. DeVoe, Ph.D.**

May, 1997

# **ASIAN BUSINESS OWNERS: a needs assessment EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

submitted by  
Pamela A. DeVoe, Ph.D.

This report is the result of a needs assessment survey carried out with Asian business people in the Greater South Grand area. The study was sponsored by the International Institute of Metropolitan St. Louis with funding from the St. Louis Community Foundation. It centers on the Asian business owners' perceptions, concerns and suggestions involving crime and safety issues affecting them and their businesses. Twenty-one Asian businesses participated in this study, as well as nineteen Asian community leaders and representatives of the larger non-Asian American community. The principal investigator and the International Institute are grateful to all who gave so generously of their time and consideration.

While one of the primary objectives of this research was to delineate the impact of Asian gangs on this population, security as a broad-based issue was explored. Overall, the participants of this study expressed a sense of insecurity from both within their ethnic community and from outside their ethnic community. One of the most telling findings, however, is that people do not consider the Asian gang problems to be as significant as they were six months to a year ago. They attribute police activity to undermining the gang's overt existence in the area. People believe that the remaining gangs, both those with out-of-state and those with local members, can be eradicated through direct (arrest) and indirect (overt surveillance) police action. Such measures would make staying in St. Louis too "uncomfortable" for them. Another problem is certain at-risk Asian youth in the middle school and high school age range. They are a potential source for future problems, such as becoming gang members. The sense of insecurity from outside the ethnic community stems from several sources involving problems with non-Asian-American youth, the mass media, and the efficacy of American law and the legal system.

Clearly, the safety issue is complex and requires a multifaceted approach in resolving current problems and preventing future ones. Not the least element which needs to be considered is the total socioeconomic context in which these businesses exist. This context includes both the larger heterogeneous American community and the more delimited intraethnic community. Without taking the context into account, as these interviews demonstrated, there can be no security for individual businesses. The essential requirements involve knowledge, trust, control, and effective preparation through education. Working in partnership, the larger American society and the intraethnic communities must address the issues of crime and safety together.

The following recommendations recognize this interdependency. They are derived from concerns expressed or suggestions made by the people interviewed.

## **OBSERVATIONS & SUGGESTIONS**

### ***OBSERVATIONS MADE BY ASIAN BUSINESS PEOPLE***

#### **POLICE**

- \* **Initiate a program where the business people and others of their respective ethnic communities learn more about the function and structure of the city police and the judicial system.**
- \* **Increase and intensify personal contact between business owners and police, for example, drop in for a cup of coffee.**

#### **GANGS**

- \* **The FBI and local police authorities should:**
  - ~ **Keep pressure on potential and present gang members;**
  - ~ **Maintain high visibility;**
  - ~ **Maintain and expand on-going ties with the community;**
- \* **The local government agencies and police authorities should:**
  - ~ **Provide overt surveillance on houses and apartments where gang members hang out;**
  - ~ **Encourage neighbors to keep track of activities and file complaints. Assure confidentiality;**
  - ~ **Arrest people for loitering if there are too many people together in an area;**
  - ~ **Keep pressure on landlords to maintain their properties, by using such tools as the nuisance laws.**
- \* **At risk high school age youth:**
  - ~ **Encourage local businesses to hire young people for a limited number of hours per week.**
  - ~ **Set up positive alternatives to gang activities.**
  - ~ **Encourage the school district to establish an alternative program for illiterate and undereducated middle and high school age students.**

#### **SELF-HELP**

- \* **Produce and translate written materials with personal and property safety guidelines for both home and business.**
- \* **Send a questionnaire to each Vietnamese residence and business asking about crimes such as burglaries, break-ins, vandalism, and street violence.**

#### **BUSINESS ASSOCIATIONS**

- \* **Facilitate the development of a metropolitan-wide Vietnamese business association.**

- \* Translate materials sent to Asian owned businesses into the owner's home language.
- \* Establish on-going personal communication with business owners to inform them and to get the owners' input on association issues.

#### **COMMUNITY**

- \* Inform all new arrivals, and update the present immigrant community, of immigration laws affecting people found guilty of certain crimes.
- \* Encourage more solidarity and communication among those within the Vietnamese community, tying together the business, residential and religious elements.
- \* Support the expression of diverse points of view from within the community through either one newspaper or, if that is not possible, through two complementary newspapers.

#### ***OBSERVATIONS OF THE PROJECT: POTENTIAL STRATEGIES***

- \* Train police officers and 911 operators to develop special limited-English communication skills.
- \* Recognize the need for more materials and translations of those materials.
- \* Establish cultural sensitivity training classes for those involved in multicultural organizations or settings.
- \* Concentrate further effort on assessing and developing a bridge between the Asian business community and the larger business community.
- \* Develop additional activities and educational programs for refugee youth.
- \* Seek funding for translations, additional policing and additional services by each of the agencies involved.
- \* Recognize that there are insignificant existing funds to accomplish these goals. Therefore, more funding is needed and should be sought out in order to implement these suggestions.
- \* Implement in-depth ethnographic research studies of those issues most involved in determining security issues at present and in the future.

# CONTENTS

---

INTRODUCTION .....	1
BELIEFS, CONCERNS AND SUGGESTIONS OF ASIAN BUSINESS OWNERS	
I. Community .....	7
II. Attitude toward Police .....	9
III. Perspectives: Local Associations .....	13
IV. Perspectives toward Self Help .....	14
V. Criminal Activity .....	17
IV. The non-Asian-American Community .....	21
OVERVIEW & CONCLUSIONS.....	23
SUMMARY OF SUGGESTIONS.....	25
APPENDIX .....	33
I. Viewpoints of Representatives from the Larger Community	
II. Viewpoints of Vietnamese Community Leaders	
III. South Grand Interview Schedule	
IV. Bibliography	
V. INTERNET articles	

## INTRODUCTION

This needs assessment survey among Asian business owners in the South Grand Boulevard's International District was conducted on behalf of the International Institute and their "Community Links" project. This project was developed in response to requests from police and ethnic and non-ethnic business owners. The following details the result of a needs assessment survey and their perceptions of crime and safety problems which affect them and their businesses.

The goal of "Community Links" is two fold: to understand the factors which make Asian business owners vulnerable to crime, and to formulate a plan of action to empower them to resist such crime. Funding for the project was provided by the St. Louis Community Foundation. It is due to the level of respect and trust that the Asian business owners have for the International Institute which allowed for the successful completion of this study in such a short period of time.

As an initial part of this study, a review of the literature on Asian gangs and gang behavior was completed. From this review it became clear that, first, there is little published material on Asian gangs and what there is has been produced within the past few years (note the Bibliography in the Appendix). Second, for this newly developing area of inquiry the INTERNET certainly has the most to offer. Unfortunately, due to the nature of the INTERNET the quality of its materials is uneven and of unknown veracity. Nevertheless, the INTERNET materials (note the Appendix for a range of what is available) show the recent rise in concern over Asian gangs in communities all over the country. It also shows how Asian gang development is part of a national and international trend. The gang phenomenon is now found in every state, on American Indian reservations, in small towns, and in rural areas, as well as in urban centers. It is a social phenomenon beyond any one ethnic group's inherent composition.

The INTERNET materials aptly raise another point: one side effect of concern for controlling the development and impact of gangs is stereotyping. For example, in Orange County, California, all young Asian males are suspected of being gang members. Therefore, it is important to point out that the number of young people involved in gang activity, or other types of illegal activity, is a small percentage of the total population of their ethnic group. The Institute estimates that currently about 16,000 or more (of which 7,000 are foreign born) Vietnamese-Americans live in the South Grand area. Of these only a handful, about 30 or more young people, are consistently indicated as problems or potential problems for their community

(although the exact number cannot be known and it may be larger).

With this caution to avoid stereotyping being noted, it is also important to recognize the influence these problem youth have. The impact, in fear and insecurity, of this small group on their community is greater than their numbers would suggest. It is critical to the well-being of the community that this potential gang element be controlled and that it not draw in other young people.

The principal investigator wishes to express her gratitude to all of the participants in the study who gave so generously of their time. The input of each and every person was valuable in developing a picture of the needs of the businesses and surrounding community. This study could not have been accomplished without their involvement. She is also especially thankful to Mr. Ngoc Doan and Mrs. Sarah Leung, M.S.W. who assisted in the interviews and added their insight into the on-going investigation.

## **HISTORY OF THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT PROJECT**

Founded in 1919, the International Institute of St. Louis is one of more than 60 immigrant service agencies established in metropolitan areas at the end of World War I. Ruth H. Watkins and its other founders were deeply concerned with helping newcomers develop the skills and knowledge they would need for life in America, while retaining an appreciation for their own diverse cultural heritages. This dual-faceted approach of addressing both social and cultural needs has characterized the agency throughout its long history.

Since the beginning, the Institute has provided a wide variety of adjustment services, including education, job placement, legal assistance and counseling to new Americans in St. Louis. These services have been particularly effective during the past two decades, when thousands of refugees from war-torn countries throughout the world have required help in adjusting to American life. In 1995, approximately 3,000 refugees and immigrants from more than 40 countries received social and educational services in one or more of the Institute's departments. Through its public reputation and its many personal links with the ethnic communities in St. Louis, the International Institute has become the clearinghouse for information and referral activities involving new Americans and their descendants.

Between 1980 and 1990 St. Louis City's Asian population more than doubled. In the last five years, growth has been equally if not more rapid. Refugees from Southeast Asia began arriving in St. Louis in 1975. Today, an estimated 7,000 refugees from Vietnam make their home on the city's Southside. Adding in the American-born children (and grandchildren), the total Vietnamese-American population is estimated at more than 16,000. Although the community is divided between people of Vietnamese and ethnic Chinese-Vietnamese (referred

to as Sino-Vietnamese) extraction, all adults speak Vietnamese as a first or second language.

A majority of the aforementioned community resides on South Grand Boulevard or in nearby neighborhoods. Most of these refugees were resettled in St. Louis by the International Institute, the largest sponsor of refugees in Missouri. Institute staff found newly-arrived refugees housing conveniently near its Southside facility at 3800 Park Avenue. As a result, a large and stable Vietnamese community has evolved in Greater South Grand<sup>1</sup> in the past decade-and-a-half.

Most of these Vietnamese-Americans have rapidly settled into the local community and economy. Initially, having arrived as refugees, most found minimum wage jobs at local factories, hotels, and restaurants. However, many of them wanted "better lives" for themselves and their families. A combination of previous entrepreneurial experience as well as a strong desire to improve their working conditions led many of these refugees to establish small businesses. Family members pooled their savings to open a business, for in many cases the business provided jobs for all employable members of a family.

The combination of a concentrated population and the gradual accumulation of savings by families has led to a virtual explosion of Asian-owned small businesses in this Southside area. The number of international businesses in the neighborhood has grown exponentially, with the addition not only of Asian but also of Latino and Middle Eastern markets and restaurants. Today, there are 38 international businesses in the Southside area: 82% of them are owned by Asians, almost all of whom are Vietnamese or ethnic Chinese-Vietnamese.

As these international businesses prospered, their success attracted a number of other consumer-oriented businesses. In addition, the availability of stores catering to their special needs has encouraged refugees and immigrants to buy homes, helping to stabilize property values in the area. Thus, the rise of Asian- (primarily Vietnamese-) owned businesses has led to the revitalization of an area of the City previously in rapid decline. Asian-American entrepreneurs have become a major key to the continued survival and "rebirth" of this South St. Louis neighborhood.

On the other hand, while most Asian-Americans are productive and contributing members of the community, a marginalized part of each population creates difficulties for everyone. More specifically, Vietnamese gangs are seen as becoming an increasing problem for the

---

<sup>1</sup> The Southside area referred to as "Greater South Grand" stretches from Kingshighway to Jefferson and from Russell to Chippewa, including portions of Gravois and Cherokee Between Jefferson and Grand. Refugees and immigrants's homes are scattered throughout this area and businesses are located on the main thoroughfares.



growing number of refugee and immigrant business people revitalizing the greater South Grand business area. As with other populations, Asian gangs prey primarily on members of their own ethnic communities. However, recent publicity about the problem is frightening not only Asian community members but many non-Asians, especially county residents who frequent area businesses. The greater South Grand business area is threatened with destabilization, risking a slide back to the deteriorating neighborhood of the early 1980s.

The problems with Asian gangs has attracted considerable attention from local media. For example, in February 1996 Channel 5 News did a three-art series about Asian gangs, centering on the South Grand area. Around the same time, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch (January 29, 1996) wrote about a growing gang problem in the area. In addition, the Third Police District Business Association President, Timothy Boyle, also broached the subject of gang problems with the Institute's president, Anna Crosslin, as did Joseph Richardson, Captain of the Third District Police.

Although there is a growing amount of information on the gang problems gathered by outsiders (media and police), it is just that -- superficial, external to the actual experiences and attempted solutions of the Asian business owners. Bilingual staff members at the Institute, themselves former refugees, have already given the Institute their perspectives on the scope and complexity of the problem. In addition, research conducted by the Institute's Dr. Ann Rynearson in 1988-1991 offered early indications of the problem before it grew as serious as it is today.

Thus, there have been indications of a growing problem with Asian gangs threatening Vietnamese-owned businesses on the City's Southside. What has not been available is extensive data from the business-owners' own perspective of the problem of crime and safety, including ethnic gangs. Recognizing this gap in information, the International Institute obtained funding from the St. Louis Community Foundation for a needs assessment study which was carried out between November, 1996 and April, 1997.

## METHODOLOGY

Qualitative data were gathered using unstructured and structured interview techniques. Twenty-one Asian businesses<sup>2</sup> in the greater South Grand area were contacted initially by a

---

<sup>2</sup> All business people were foreign born. There were 11 Vietnamese, 4 Sino-Vietnamese (that is, people of Chinese descent from Vietnam), 3 Chinese, and 3 Thai businesses included in the study.

letter from the International Institute and later in person<sup>3</sup>. The study and its objectives were described to them and the owner or manager was asked to participate. Once the conditions of privacy and confidentiality were established, no one refused to be interviewed. Only two of the original 21 businesses did not participate in the study; both were closed by the time they were contacted for an interview. In one case, the building had been sold and all tenants forced to move. The owners decided to retire and not reopen in a new location. The second business

ETHNICITY					
TYPE OF BUSINESS		Vietnamese	Sino- Vietnamese	Chinese	Thai <sup>4</sup>
	Restaurant	5	3	2	1
	Grocery		1		1
	Video Rental	2			
	Jewelry <sup>5</sup>	2			
	Miscellaneous <sup>6</sup>	2		1	1

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Pamela A. DeVoe, the principal investigator in the study, is a social scientist and multi-cultural specialist. She has been involved in refugee research for 17 years. For most of the interviews she was accompanied by a Vietnamese or Chinese staff member from the International Institute. These staff members not only assisted by allowing people to use their native language during the interviews, but they also brought with them the credibility of the International Institute as the study sponsor.

<sup>4</sup> The three businesses represented here are owned and managed by members of one extended family. The grocery store and restaurant are owned and managed by the same individual and, therefore, are represented by one interview.

<sup>5</sup> One of these jewelry stores and the television repair shop are owned by one couple and are represented by one interview. The second jewelry store and a restaurant are also owned by one couple, however, the individual owner/manager of each store was interviewed separately.

<sup>6</sup> This consists of one store each: hair salon, television and video repair, general merchandise, and an Asian gift shop.

closed and the owner apparently left the area. However, within a short time a new tenant moved into the building space and opened a Vietnamese restaurant. The new owner agreed to be interviewed and is included in this needs assessment study.

The Asian business people were all interviewed in their businesses during the business day. In four cases the principal investigator carried out the interview alone and in English. In all other interviews, a member of the International Institute staff, who was a native speaker of either Vietnamese or Cantonese, accompanied the principal investigator. The staff member explained the project and its objectives. The business person was then given a choice of having the interview in English or in his or her native language. Four of the business owners spoke mainly in their native language. Of this latter group, three of them also had a family member, who did speak English, participate in the interview. These interviews were carried out in a mix of English with Vietnamese or Cantonese.

In order to gain more insight into the larger milieu in which these businesses operate, 19 open-ended interviews were also carried out with local Vietnamese leaders<sup>7</sup>, representatives of the larger non-Asian American community, and a local resident with specialized knowledge of gang activity. Those in the non-Asian American community were chosen because of their involvement in the greater South Grand area or because of their expertise on gangs or Asian gangs. Six Vietnamese community leaders, three religious and three non-religious, were interviewed. The religious specialists represent the Buddhist, Catholic and Protestant faiths. The twelve non-Asian Americans include three St. Louis police officers who work in the area; two local Neighborhood Stabilization Officers; one South Grand Business District Representative; one South Grand Business Association Board member; five outside experts in gang behavior; and one Southeast Asian with insights into local Asian gang activity.

---

<sup>7</sup> The term Vietnamese is used in this report to refer to both Vietnamese and Sino-Vietnamese and represents 75% of the businesses included in this study.

## BELIEFS, CONCERNS AND SUGGESTIONS OF ASIAN BUSINESS OWNERS

### COMMUNITY

Of the three Chinese<sup>8</sup> and three Thai<sup>9</sup> businesses, the owners' ethnic community did not appear to be a significant factor in their sense of security for themselves or their businesses. The Vietnamese businesses, however, have a sizable community around them in the greater South Grand area. This Vietnamese community has proven to be both a source of business and, sometimes, a source of concern over issues of safety. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the makeup and development of this community in order to understand its problems and to identify solutions.

The following description of the Vietnamese in St. Louis is based on perceptions and comments from Vietnamese interviewees. In other words, it is a projection of the community's view of its own history and socio-economic composition as it presently exists<sup>10</sup>.

The Vietnamese community in St. Louis is often seen as homogeneous by the non-Vietnamese community. Yet, nothing could be further from the truth. There are many subdivisions within the group based on class, geographic area, and ethnicity (e.g., Vietnamese versus Sino-Vietnamese). While these are potential areas for division, at present the most significant differentiating factor centers around personal experiences since the fall of South Vietnam to the communists and the exit of the Americans from Vietnam. People came to the United States over a period of time, bringing a variety of personal experiences; therefore, they have different expectations of, and coping strategies for adjusting to, their new life.

---

<sup>8</sup> The Chinese businesses were owned by a Chinese from Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong respectively.

<sup>9</sup> These three businesses were all owned by members of one family.

<sup>10</sup> It is interesting to note that there was no mention of the Amerasians and their families. This, in spite of the fact that they have been resettled in the St. Louis area since at least 1983. The fact that this group is never even referred to indicates how marginalized they are within the Vietnamese community.

The first wave of Vietnamese refugees came in 1975-1980. They knew nothing about survival outside of their home country, but they tended to be more educated. They also brought a strong commitment to the advancement of their families through education and work. This group is largely settled and many of their children have completed higher education and are establishing themselves in careers and jobs. Most do not live in St. Louis City, since many were originally resettled in the County due to sponsorship by county churches. There appears to be no endemic problem with this group as a whole. Some have come back to the Vietnamese community to help support more recent arrivals.

The second wave came in 1980-1988. This group consists largely of ethnic Chinese from Vietnam, called Sino-Vietnamese. Once the Vietnamese communist government took over, they rejected the Chinese who had been living in Vietnam, some for one to three generations. These people left Vietnam, bringing their money, work ethic and skill in entrepreneurship. Some of the business people along South Grand are from this group. As with the first group, they are dedicated to the advancement of their families through hard work, deferred gratification, and education for the next generation.

The third wave came in 1988-1997. These families and individuals came under the Humanitarian Orderly Departure (HO) Act<sup>11</sup>. The American government brought in people from Vietnam who had been imprisoned in re-education camps due to their involvement with the previous government or with the United States. These men may have been in prison for five, ten, or more, years before being able to leave with their families. Others had been released from camps, but lived a "half-life" for several years before coming to the United States. While in Vietnam their families lived under the stigma of their husband or father being in a re-education camp. Such families suffered abuse and prejudice by the larger Vietnamese society.

When the third group entered the United States, they were different from those who had arrived earlier. The men from the re-education camps were older, in their forties and fifties, as they began yet another radically different phase in their lives, that of refugee. Because they had suffered so much for having sided with the United States during the war, they felt, and still feel, that the United States should help take care of them. Yet, once here, they found that there was no special care offered for them and their families. Today they often are living in old

---

<sup>11</sup> In actuality this wave is made up of two parts: those who came under the Humanitarian Orderly Departure Act and Amerasians. By late Spring of 1988, the International Institute had been designated by the American Council for Nationalities Service as one of its four initial cluster sites for Amerasian resettlement. This decision was based on the Institute's previous experience with Amerasian resettlement and its demonstrated ability to develop and provide innovative services for Amerasians. Staff at the International Institute indicated that some of the original gang activity in St. Louis involved Amerasians and their siblings.

apartments with few material benefits and dependent on slim public aid to survive.

Their children had also suffered in Vietnam. Compared to their neighbors whose fathers were not in re-education camps, they were usually poor and received little or no education. They find it harder to trust people. While they now have the opportunity to attend school, it is very difficult for them. Their difficulty is largely due to their being placed in grade levels according to their age, regardless of their formal educational background. These young people have several problems facing them. They find themselves in school with little idea about how to handle the educational materials; therefore, they cannot succeed. Their English ability is minimal, so they are unable to communicate with others. Plus, since they were allowed "to run around" in Vietnam (because they were not allowed in the schools), they lack the habits which would make their school experience more palatable and profitable. As a result, some of these boys and girls have gathered together for friendship and mutual support.

While their parents are at work, some of these young people avoid school and gather together. Several problems are developing out of this situation. First, they will remain undereducated in a society which requires a certain level of literacy and English skills to get and maintain a decent job and wage. Second, free of school and parental influence, their desire for money leads them to shoplift and to break into other people's apartments. Third, since the boys and girls are together and unsupervised for much of the time, there is an increased likelihood of the girls getting pregnant. Fourth, this group, isolated and without community ties, is a prime pool for potential future gang members. When parents try to control their children's behavior their efforts meet with difficulty. Both the parents and the children believe that the American laws undermine the parents' power to deal with their children. Parents feel that they cannot do anything to assert their authority over their family if the children choose not to listen to them.

As one interviewee said, "If you help these young people, they will like you, but, if you do not help them, they will make problems for you." This interviewee went on to say, that right now, the youths feel that because they are underage (and therefore, will not be tried as adults), and because their parents have little ability to force them to comply with family values, that they are virtually free to do what they want. After these youths turn 18 years of age, they recognize that they will no longer go to juvenile court, but will be tried in the regular court as adults. Therefore, once they reach this age they may try to stay out of trouble; however the seeds of future problems may have already been sown.

## **ATTITUDE TOWARD POLICE**

Generally speaking, police are not held in high regard in Southeast Asia and China. Parents would not consider police work to be a very good occupational choice for their children.

Police are often associated with spying on the community, that is, as being a watch dog for controlling community members rather than as a mechanism for protecting the community. This cultural bias of distrust, based on traditional values and war-time experiences, is well-known among the non-Asian community representatives interviewed. The latter consider it to be an on-going hurdle for developing a positive working relationship between American police officers and the local Asian business owners.

It is important to point out that the Asian business people consistently indicated that they do indeed distinguish between the quality and character of police officers in their home areas and in St. Louis. The large majority of respondents perceived the local police as doing a good job and being effective in controlling crime in the business area. At the same time, there remains a sense of conflict concerning the police and their role: control of the innocent or protection of the community. This conflict creates a complex set of feelings towards the police which makes people want to avoid at one level and to trust at another level. In part this is due to their not really understanding how the police and judicial structures work.

The police officers in the business area are reported to have good relations with many of the business people, because the officers walk the streets, stop in at various businesses to say "hi" or to have a cup of tea, or even just wave as they walk past the store. This gives people a sense of security. And, although one business person said that the police were "too casual," the comment was later modified by saying that the police "do try to be a part of the street", increasing their visibility and, therefore, creating a more positive image of safety within the area.

The level of **police visibility** is considered to be important to the safety of the neighborhood. A few people thought that just seeing a police car in the neighborhood was more important than having police walking the streets, because the car is more visible. One comment was: "they can always get out of their cars." Most people, however, thought that the presence of the police on the streets was a key to keeping criminal activity down. There was agreement that the actual behavior of the police was not as important as their mere presence, their visibility.

A few businesses felt that the police were not very successful in making the area secure. These were usually businesses that had suffered multiple burglaries or were located in an area where they and other businesses in the proximity had suffered multiple burglaries. In particular, these were people who had come face to face with criminals in the act of committing their crimes. Which is to say, that their sense of personal safety was at risk. Other business owners who had suffered burglaries in the past, during hours when the store was closed, and therefore, no one was present, still felt the police officers were keeping the area safe. Most people thought that the police have become more effective. Overall, the police are seen as having helped keep the crime down in the area over the past six months to a year.

People are divided on how they feel about **police response time** in the case of a crime. Interestingly, whether the people feel the police have good response time or not, does not depend on the actual number of minutes it takes the police to arrive. Generally, people said that the police arrive within 10-20 minutes of their telephone call. What appears to be related to the difference in perception on whether this response time is good or not is the condition under which the call is made.

As mentioned above, for those business owners who have caught a perpetrator in the act of the crime, and therefore, were themselves in a dangerous position, the police response time was much too slow. Two interviewees complained, giving examples of needing the police and calling 911. However, between the time when the calls were placed and when the police came, they had stopped other police officers in the vicinity and asked them to help, but those police would not assist. The police said that they would not intervene because the 911 call had been made and "help was on the way." The stress of dealing with a potentially dangerous situation by themselves when a trained officer is in the vicinity made the people in both of these incidents very unhappy with the importance of protocol over common sense by the police officer.

The police response time was considered to be quite good by those business owners who have not been personally involved in an attempted burglary, for example, those owners who received a call from the police saying that their security alarm went off or that a neighbor called indicating that someone had broken into their business. The quick appearance of the police was seen as possibly having prevented further trouble. Most of these people feel that the police work very hard and that they come quickly when they receive a call for help.

One business person said that when the police go past their restaurant, they look into the windows and if they think that there might be a problem, they stop and check. For example, when they saw several young males standing around inside the restaurant, the officers came in to make sure everything was all right.

Everyone is aware of the increased **presence of police and security officers** (which a few do not distinguish from the police) and credit this increased presence and visibility with a safer environment. Because it is so successful, people would like to see more police officers on the streets at other times as well. The times most mentioned as being particularly sensitive are when the high school gets out and the students are waiting for their buses; when it gets dark in the early evening during the winter; and between 9:00 and 11:00 p.m. when the businesses are closing. Also, keeping in mind the perception of the larger metropolitan area toward the South Grand business area, some suggested that the increased visibility of police, e.g., the walking and biking officers, makes people from the county less afraid and therefore, more likely to patronize the South Grand businesses.

At the same time that the business people on South Grand say that the business area has



been safer over the past six months to a year, the businesses further south, for example on Chippewa, note that their immediate area is "going down hill." They cite shootings and robberies they read about in the newspaper, for example at Jack-in-the-Box and at a local hair salon.

Much of the criminal activity suffered by these businesses further south, however, is considered to be at a level which the police would not consider important enough to deal with, yet is a constant stress on the businesses. These are **petty crimes**, such as ordering food, taking it out, eating most of it, and returning it saying they want their money back because something was "found" in the food; stealing the condiment holders off tables; or ordering food and then leaving without paying for it; and vandalizing their businesses. The more "Americanized" business owners, however, mentioned petty incidents, such as drunks yelling at customers, as examples of when the police officers do come quickly and effectively reestablish peace. The differences involved may be derived from the location of the businesses (more isolated from other businesses versus clustered together on South Grand) and, perhaps, being able to "prove" disreputable behavior (i.e., the drunk versus claiming the food was contaminated).

**Feedback** was one problem that was consistent among those who had problems for which they had to call in the police. After reporting an incident to the police, the police would come, take down all of the information, leave and never get back to the business owners on the status of their problem. Some people said that they never knew if anyone was ever arrested or not. If someone was arrested, they did not know what happened to them: did they go to trial; were they found guilty or innocent; did they go to jail or not? Even when the police officer told them that they would get in touch with them again, the business person might not have heard any more from the police. At the same time, they might see the person who committed the act back on the streets around their business. One business mentioned trying to call the police station to find out the status of their problem. Not only could they not get any information at the time, but no one ever called the owner back as expected, either. As a result, the owner has less confidence in the police and their ability "to do much." This owner added that the police officers do not seem to care about the type of crime the store suffered, that the police only care about bigger, more serious crimes (murder, rape).

It is the issue of known thieves being around on the streets, even after being caught by the police for a specific crime, that is most disturbing to people. Here the owners clearly distinguished between the law versus the police and their level of competence, which generally was considered quite good. People consider the law to be much too lenient. Criminals are back on the street the very next day after being arrested. "I have seen it," said more than one person. This raises the level of insecurity and fear of possible **retaliation**. This is particularly true of those who are sole proprietors, who have small businesses or work alone. Many pointed out that with such a system there is no reason for a potential criminal to fear punishment, just the opposite. The potential victim fears retaliation once the criminal is back on the streets.

While police officers and other non-Asian interviewees commented on the fear Asians have of police, none of the Asian business people mentioned this. As mentioned previously, people do distinguish between police in their home country and police here. Some did, however, mention *the fear of being seen talking to police*. The concern is that the community's criminal element will assume that the individual is reporting illegal behavior and/or disclosing who the criminals might be. Such an impression would put the business person, and possibly his or her family, in danger.

## PERSPECTIVES: LOCAL ASSOCIATIONS

Just over one third of the businesses represented said they are active in the South Grand Business Association organization, either directly or through a family member. One third of the businesses are outside of the South Grand Business Association area and have no comparable business association in their area, although they may be aware of and somewhat involved with the Neighborhood Associations. Just under one third of the businesses are within the South Grand Business area, but do not participate in the association meetings.

The business owners expressed three levels of understanding vis-a-vis the relationship between themselves and the South Grand Business Association. First, all businesses belong to the association based on the fact that they pay fees for their license. Nothing else needs to be done. Second, there is a fee of \$400.00 for every six month period to belong to the association. Third, they are aware of the Business Association and some of the things that they organize, but they do not think that they belong to the association themselves. Of the latter group in particular, there is no real knowledge of the association and what it does. The owners cannot read the letters sent to them and, therefore, are unaware of association projects.

Often, whether or not the business owners believe that they belong to the association, they feel that the association is doing a good job, particularly with the extra security patrol. Most of the people felt that there are not as many crime problems right now that need special attention as there were six months to a year ago. In terms of being able to express an opinion about association issues, one person mentioned that the Third District Police Association<sup>12</sup> sent a **questionnaire**. The owner thought that this was helpful and felt the questionnaire provided a voice for all businesses.

For those people who are **not involved** with the Business Association, many said that they were too busy with their shop or restaurant and family responsibilities to be able to go to

---

<sup>12</sup> This is a business association whose said purpose is to support the community and the police.

the meetings. They are "just making a living" as one person put it. Or as another said, "they come to work, stay here, and go home to sleep and care for the kids." This does not leave much time for anything else.

One person felt that the business association is for bigger businesses, not the "little guy." As one person commented, there are a few people who are "somewhat shy." Sometimes the meeting hours were mentioned as a problem. When the store has a sole proprietor, the business would have to be closed in order for the owner to attend a meeting. This is obviously not practical.

For those who have others to watch the business while they are gone, there is still the question of communication. One person mentioned that he has gone to business meetings, but he does not understand what is being said. So, even though he has gone a few times, he does not belong to the association as an active member. He depends on the business owner next door to him to keep him informed on what is happening and what is important. Some owners maintain that their self-perceived inadequate English language ability makes them feel uncomfortable at meetings. This is true, even though their English is comparable to others of the same ethnic community who are involved in the Business Association. As one owner said, they are afraid they won't understand what is being discussed and will feel "stupid." Another owner told me that it costs money to be a member, and while he did go to a meeting, later he did not know what they said. As a result, he did not feel it made sense to join the association. It is important to note that the language barrier these people speak of is not caused by a complete lack of English ability; for some, as was the case in the latter example, the interview itself was in English. The inability to understand what is happening is a combination of cultural, behavioral and linguistic issues.

For those businesses outside of the South Grand Business Association area, there is not yet a comparable association. These people appear to be more aware of the Neighborhood Association and its activities, such as those dealing with neighborhood safety.

## **PERSPECTIVES TOWARD SELF HELP**

All of the business owners have implemented various strategies to secure their businesses and property. Such strategies often vary by the experiences they have had with problems in safety and crime and by the size of the business itself. Typical security measures are: iron gates on the back and/or front door, or a security system which ties in with a security company and, through them, the police, fire, and medical emergency centers. One retail shop put in a monitor after a couple of incidences of shop lifting. Another shop owner feels strongly that the best security is what each owner puts in place himself. In his case, he has a business in a duplex building, where his wife has a business in the adjacent shop. He has put in three

security cameras: one outside, one at his front door, and one into his wife's shop. He has a TV screen in his store which allows him to monitor all of the activities in his wife's business. Plus, he can call directly to the police by pushing one button. Finally, he has electronic locks on the front doors of both businesses. The only customers that can come into the shop are those they allow inside. These are all strong measures for his shop; nevertheless, they are not available to all of the various businesses run by the Asians in the areas. Specifically restaurants and retail stores are less likely to be able to have as much control over who they allow into their store.

People also **work together** by watching over each other and calling a nearby business if there is a problem. One business owner said that she and her neighbor had a code word which they could use over the telephone to alert the other that there was a problem situation in their store. Another owner gave an example where a non-Asian owner, from a business across the street from the interviewee, saw a robbery occurring at his place and called the police. Although he does not speak English very well (the interview was completely translated), he knows that this other business woman keeps an eye out for him. Another business mentioned a neighbor, an American businessman from across the street, calling the police when there was a robbery in progress.<sup>13</sup>

There is recognition that although the **security systems** would help bring the police if needed, such systems are more of a deterrent than a prevention. For even with police response time of 10 to 20 minutes, a criminal can steal quite a bit within that period. Plus, for most of the businesses, it is the nature of their businesses, whether restaurants or retail, that their doors must be open to a wide variety of customers, making them more vulnerable and without security.

Thus, as one owner said, although he can try to protect himself, he still needs the help of the police. For example, one business owner, who had a security system including a video, noted it still "don't do any good" in protecting them from robbery. In the latter case, the thieves wore masks and were dressed in Halloween costumes. Another business commented that although he could use a security system, he does not have one because, one, it is too expensive for the amount of income his shop generates, and two, he does not speak English and therefore, cannot tell the security company what his problem is if he has one. As a result, as he says, his only security is to close the door. Another shop owner says that he knows he should have a security system, but he does not worry about it because he "does not make much money." Nevertheless, he also added that he was going to set up a security system soon.

---

<sup>13</sup> Although the police had already been alerted by the security system, by the time they arrived the perpetrators had fled. The thieves were Vietnamese but never found and caught.

People have learned to keep the minimum amount of cash in their cash registers during the day and none over night. In some cases the whole cash register is taken and put away in a secure place when the shop is closed for the night. By and large, if there is money on the premises, people hide it. Thus, in their perception at least, the hidden money is less susceptible to theft.

Petty crime, vandalism and general harassment can be a problem for those businesses that appear more **vulnerable**, because of their size or the inability of the proprietor to speak English. One restaurant owner told of African-American youths coming into her business and causing trouble. They were at the counter pushing the buttons on the cash register. They "peed on the wall" and then left. They soon came back with ice that they had bought at a local 711 and threw it all over the floor of the restaurant. She called the police, but the youths ran away before the police arrived.

**Pan-handlers**, American whites and blacks, sometimes come into restaurants and ask customers and the owner for money. One proprietor said, "they don't hurt anyone, they just ask for money for wine." Often, the business owners give them a few dollars at first. If they keep returning, they are told that they cannot give them any more money, then the pan-handlers stop coming. One of the larger business owners complained that if people would not give these pan-handlers any money then they would leave the area. Because the South Grand area is considered more wealthy than other areas, such as Chippewa, more pan-handlers come to South Grand. Therefore, according to this person, giving them money to get rid of them has the opposite effect. The store owners see pan-handlers as a nuisance, not as a threat. However, they do scare customers and that makes them a concern.

Overall, the business owners felt that their businesses were safe during the day. Several mentioned that they were concerned about safety in the evening when they close their shops. And a few mentioned problems outside their businesses, i.e., of pan-handlers approaching potential customers, of purse snatching and of car break-ins. These latter situations can be dealt with by more police patrolling the area for longer periods, but also by the people who come into area behaving in a way which would deter crimes (i.e., do not give money to the pan-handlers, do not carry purses, and keep the inside of the car clean).

One business, more isolated than the others, said that they would handle problems by giving the people what they want, money or whatever. They have not yet had a problem with a robbery when they were in the restaurant. They keep their lights bright at all times, even when closed and keep their windows uncluttered and open so that passing police and others can see inside. Most of the trouble they have had has come when the restaurant was closed. For example, people would break in to steal cigarettes. They do call the police whenever there is a problem to at least keep a record of the events. Out of about 5-6 break-ins in one year, for example, they pressed charges a couple of times. Often, because the crime occurs at night,

there are not enough clues to find the thief and make an arrest.

A few of the business owners take a more **proactive approach**. They keep alert, watching for potential problems. If they see someone whom they think is going to cause trouble, they take action. In one case, a restaurant owner told of a few youths, whom she thought might be gang members, coming into her business to eat. She was polite and talkative with them. Through a ruse, she was able to get the name and telephone number of one of the group. In that way if anything happened she would be able to give it to the police. Also, these owners have certain standard procedures for protecting themselves and discouraging thieves. For example, they believe that the goal of potential thieves is to find out how much money is on hand and how the cash register opens. The thieves can get this information by coming in and asking for change. Therefore, some businesses do not give change to people who come in from the street and are not customers.

One very gregarious store owner believes that the way to prevent crimes is tied closely with how the owners and their employees treat people. This proprietor stressed the importance of having "respect for people" and of not being prejudiced. Treat everyone alike and with respect. This owner said that the police cannot stay behind the owners for 24 hours. When the police come by the criminals will leave, but as soon as the police walk away, the criminals will come back. Therefore, you must respect people and not be prejudiced against anyone. You cannot have enough police to protect you if you do not treat people with respect. [Which is not to say that this owner leaves the business unprotected: there is a security alarm system and bars on the back door.]

Those in law enforcement and other non-Asians interviewed believe that the Vietnamese business people fear losing face if they go to the police with crime problems, feeling that they should handle these problems themselves through retaliation. However, this view was never expressed among the Asian business people interviewed. The self-help measures described here are all reasonable and common techniques used by most businesses today. Aside from these precautions, the owners said that they did not know what else to do. They said they **needed ideas** and would welcome them for better security techniques from those in law enforcement. If they knew what to do to help protect themselves or their businesses, they would do it. Nevertheless, even with the knowledge that the police cannot be everywhere at all times, they continue to rely heavily on the local police to put a barrier between themselves and potential criminals.

## **CRIMINAL ACTIVITIES**

One of the primary impetuses for this study was concern over **Asian gangs** and their impact on the South Grand business owners. Among the Asian and non-Asian groups

interviewed, people gave differing versions on what they think the gang members' characteristics and central activities are.

The non-Asian representatives tend to see the gangs as active, involving young men in their 20s. They may be mixed ethnically, including Lao, Cambodians, Chinese and Vietnamese, although the Vietnamese make up the greatest number of members. While the police officers indicated that home burglaries were a great concern, the others interviewed believed that drugs and gambling were dominant gang-related activities. The gang, or gangs, are considered to be fairly well structured, and perhaps nationally organized.

Alleged Vietnamese gang members' out-of-state license plates have been identified and are not uncommon. This evidence of out-of-state cars establishes St. Louis as a part of a national system. Although whether this is an organized or loose system of relationships is not certain. Some interviewees believe that the local gang(s) are acting under the umbrella of a successful businessman. Everyone believes that the gang members from outside the state come to St. Louis for two reasons. First, they come because they are in trouble with the law in another state, and they come here where they are not wanted as criminals. Second, the outside gang members also come to commit burglaries against local Vietnamese families and businesses with information they derive from local Vietnamese gang members. The local Vietnamese gang members know their victims personally and, therefore, can provide valuable insider information concerning the victims' valuables and habits. No one believes that there are female gang members at this time in the local gangs.

On the other hand, according to those interviewed, within the Asian community itself, the question of whether gangs still exist as an organized phenomena is open to opinion. Perhaps because of aggressive action against the gangs by police, and because of the loss of their gang leader, many people stated that they believe the gang has gone underground or even essentially disappeared. Now there are more "groupings" of young men, unorganized and without leadership. There are probably several groups of young men who get together to drink and socialize. This is not to say that illegal behavior does not occur. While some of these youths work, others do not. Therefore, those with criminal tendencies commit burglaries, robbing and stealing for spending money. Because the police have been fairly successful in thwarting gang criminal activities among area businesses, many people believe that there has been a concomitant increase in the number of home burglaries. This point is based on perceptions of community members, and probably also on hearsay from gang members, i.e., bragging of those involved.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> One young Vietnamese woman who works in the S. Grand area noted that she heard a group bragging that they had robbed three homes in the past week. Such information cannot be verified, yet the overall impact of such comments in creating an environment of fear and insecurity within the local community is great.

The age assigned to alleged gang members or potential gang members appears to depend on the concerns of the person interviewed. Alleged gang members who are involved with out-of-state gangs appear to be older, in their late teens and in their twenties. At least a few of those interviewed acknowledge knowing of this gang's existence and even where the gang appears to live. They also feel that the police must know about the gang residence since so many people (15 to 30) stay in one residence. The mere presence of this house is very upsetting. People feel that the police and other authorities should force them to leave through legal "harassment" or through arresting those who have committed crimes. This group definitely believed to be tied to a nationally connected illegal structure. Out-of-state license plates and strangers (Vietnamese men) are seen around this house. Trips are made from this location to out-of-state meetings. At least two people indicated that very young girls (14 to 15 years old) are becoming involved with this group, although they are not necessarily committing any crimes. Their role appears to be more sexual at this stage.<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, many of the Vietnamese interviewed were most focused on youths under 18 years of age (e.g., middle school and high school age). The concern is that these young people, who are often undereducated and undersupervised,<sup>16</sup> are not only potential gang members, but are also involved in committing day-time residential burglaries. The young males who commit burglaries are thought to do so because they have the opportunity, and because they realize that if caught they will only be sent to juvenile court. In other words, they do not see the law to be a deterrent to their behavior. The young girls of this age, also undereducated and undersupervised, while apparently not involved in the residential break-ins, are becoming sexually active and, in a couple of cases already, pregnant. These young people are considered a ready pool of potential gang members if steps are not taken to alleviate the familial, social and educational problems they face.

Whether the alleged gang members are older or younger, most are said to have modest to poor English ability. Although a few are proficient in English, nevertheless, several interviewees think that the language barrier is one reason many young people are drawn to gang involvement and the gang life: it is familiar and comfortable.

Among the majority of those interviewed, their comments were laced with a pervasive

---

<sup>15</sup> However, once entrapped by these gang members as sexual partners, there is the possibility of the young girls no longer believing they have alternatives to gang involvement.

<sup>16</sup> They are thought to come from single parent households or from households where both parents are working. Whether solo parents or not, the parents often work long days, six to seven days a week, and are unable to monitor their children's behavior.



sense of fear of, or concern for, potential danger from the outside community or from individuals within the Vietnamese community (including the youths mentioned above). Even the stronger and more proactive interviewees needed to be assured of the confidentiality of this report, to know that their personal comments would be buried in an aggregate of information, thereby providing them with privacy. This fear or concern included a sense that if anything was said about criminal activity or the people involved that there would be reprisals suffered by them, their businesses, and/or their families.

While there may be an exaggerated sense of fear of people within their own ethnic community, at the same time, each person can give actual situations where the security of various members of their community was breached by alleged gang members or others involved in illegal activities. For example, most of the business owners lived a distance from their place of business, but they are certain that their homes are in danger of robberies or home invasion by the criminal element within the Vietnamese community. Everyone knows stories of young men following the business owners after work, and thereby learning the whereabouts of their homes and families. Once the young men know where their homes are, it is easy to come back during the day, when the owners are at work, and rob the house. As a consequence, whenever any house is robbed, people are convinced that the robbers were very likely Vietnamese, even though no one saw them and there was no evidence that they were ethnically Vietnamese. As one interviewee said, "Bad thing people remember a long time; good thing people forget." The interviewee thinks that this is especially true of the Vietnamese because they came as refugees. Many are boat people. They have suffered in refugee camps. Now, they still have pressure from home. All that negative experience and pressure builds up and leaves them on guard and very cautious about whom to trust or not trust.

It should be pointed out, however, that the experiences people have, and even more importantly, that they hear about other people having, confirm their suspicions that revenge is not only possible, but probable. This includes the residential areas around the South Grand business district. Right now, as one person indicated, the gang members are behaving themselves in the business area; however, at the same time, people believe that the number of residential break-ins has gone up. One interviewee volunteered that probably about 60% of the Vietnamese residences have problems with gangs and home robberies. [How he came to this number is unknown.] Many people do not report their robberies, because they are afraid that the thieves will come back again. This fear is only confirmed when they see alleged criminals of any ethnic group, who were arrested one day, out on their neighborhood streets again the next day. Generally, people do not believe that the law in America is a deterrent to criminal activity. As one interviewee noted, in Vietnam if someone steals something they go to prison for 2-3 years, but here they get out immediately. For him, this situation means that the thieves are not afraid, but the normal citizen is afraid.

Among more than one half of those interviewed, including ethnic non-business people,

there appeared to be a strong sense of **insecurity**. On the other side, even given the desire for confidentiality, about one-third of the interviewees stated that they were not fearful. Rather, they felt in control of their businesses and their lives. These people were primarily the more successful and long-term business owners and/or those who speak English more fluently. A couple of people said that their fluency in English was intimidating to the potential "Vietnamese thugs". The thugs know that the business owners have more experience and can "use the system" [the law enforcement system]; therefore, they do not bother these business owners. For example, when I asked one person if he was afraid of "revenge", he said he is not worried about revenge. He noted that if a person has been picked up once, and if they then come back for revenge, they are already known, and therefore, they will be arrested and "go to jail cell."

## THE NON-ASIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

Presently, there are at least six Asian business owners actively involved in local business associations and organizations. In many ways, these people serve as a bridge to other Asian business owners. However, members of the larger American community felt that it would be better if everyone could participate more directly. They are concerned that language and cultural differences impact on how, or if, all of the Asian business people will be able to participate fully as members of the South Grand business area. Those interviewed felt that some of the Asian businesses and landlords might have trouble understanding and, therefore, complying with local laws and ordinances, thereby creating problems for themselves and for the business area. For example, the rules governing how many people can live within a residence or apartment may cause a problem if the Asian families are accustomed to large numbers of people living together or in keeping their windows open with clear visibility from the outside.

Among the Asian business owners themselves, the issue of cultural and linguistic differences was a more complex matter. The problems did not stem simply from members of their subculture not understanding local ordinances and rules. A few people mentioned that they felt that in some cases the larger American community is not supportive and is even **hostile** to them. Much of the vandalism and petty theft, and some of the more serious crimes are committed by **non-Asian Americans** in the area. The vandalism and nuisance behavior (for example, pounding on the outside store windows, laughing, and then running away or ordering food and then leaving without paying for it) are a constant irritation. While the police do help with this situation by being around when the students get on and off the buses before and after school, their presence helps keep such behavior in check, but does not eliminate it.

Then, too, a few mentioned the **biased, unsupportive demeanor** of the larger American community. This could take the shape of resistance to the growth in the number of Asian businesses in one area, and to the biased, one person said "racist", reporting in the mass media. In particular, people are concerned about the television item on Asian gangs in the South Grand

area. Certain businesses were identified and the audience was warned about the dangers of these locations. While, on the one hand, since the time of this report, the police, the business district, and the businesses have worked to ensure the safety of the area, as well as the general displacement of the gang members; on the other hand, the mass media, for its part, has done nothing to update the general public. According to more than one of these business people, potential customers from the county do not come to South Grand because they still remember these reports targeting the Vietnamese businesses as unsafe and, therefore, they are afraid of the area. As one store owner noted, "this is bad for business."

In the face of this aggravation and hostility, the owners keep their eye on the success and development of their businesses. They want to work with the local citizenry and business community. By and large, most people are very positive about their relationships with the non-Asian people around them. As one person said, smooth interpersonal relationships are all based on respect for each other, no matter what the person's ethnicity. Therefore, in spite of a few problems which may develop due to linguistic mix-ups or cultural misunderstandings, most people are positive about their interactions with those from other ethnic groups. Working together is good for the success of the area and, therefore, of each individual business. For, as one person noted with some passion, for them the success of their businesses, the source of their livelihood, is no less than a matter of survival.

## OVERVIEW & CONCLUSION

Overall, the Asian business people included in this study expressed a sense of insecurity arising from both within their ethnic community and from outside their ethnic community. While one of the primary objectives of this research was to delineate the impact of Asian gangs on this population, security as a broad-based issue was explored. One of the most telling findings is that people do not consider the Asian gang problem to be as significant as it was six months to a year ago. They attribute police activity to undermining the gang's overt existence in the area. The present gang element involves out-of-state members. These out-of-state gang members are believed to come to St. Louis to avoid prosecution in another part of the country and/or to carry out crimes against Vietnamese in the area based on information provided by local Asian gang members. People believe that these gangs can be eradicated through direct (arrest) and indirect (overt surveillance) police action. Such measures would make staying in St. Louis too "uncomfortable" for them and they would move out of the area.

Another source of insecurity is certain at-risk youth in the middle school and high school age range. These children have come to the United States either illiterate or severely undereducated in their home language and are ill prepared for their American schooling experience. Their parent or parents are working long hours and are unable to monitor or control their behavior. While not actually gang members, they tend to be absent from school, joining together in their homes while the parents are at work. Some home burglaries of Vietnamese residences are thought to be committed by the boys in this group. Another problem is increased sexual activity leading to pregnancy. To the Vietnamese this group of children appear to be out of control, without traditional values and respect for authority. They are a potential source for even greater problems in the future, for example, becoming members of Asian gangs.

There is a sense of distrust among the adults, and in particular the leaders, within the Vietnamese community as well. This distrust expresses itself through questioning people's motives for community service, through questioning people's political leanings, i.e., whether they are pro-communist or not, whether they are involved with the present Vietnamese government or not. Anyone who goes back to Vietnam to visit is considered suspect. These political divisions lead to a more generalized sense of "if you're not for us, you're against us" philosophy. Along with this distrust is the rumor that (if, in fact, any local gang does still exist) there is an older, wealthy man behind them. However, no stories or evidence could be gleaned from those interviewed to support this belief and no one could identify even vaguely whom the older man could be. Although there apparently is an older man from California who is involved with the out-of-state gang members and their coterie, he does not appear to be the source for this

belief in a local gang supporter. (It is possible that this phantom figure may be due more to the atmosphere of distrust within the community than to anything else.) Nevertheless, in spite of this underlying sense of distrust, people feel that both the business and non-business community must come together in order to help its members and to control its children respectively. Most feel that an outside agency, in particular the International Institute, can help to bring the community together.

The sense of insecurity comes from outside the ethnic community as well. First, non-Asian American youth harass, vandalize and steal from the Asian businesses. Their rowdy behavior also scares customers away. Second, American pan-handlers bother the businesses and their customers. While most business owners feel they are harmless, they do represent a concern. Third, the mass-media specifically targeted areas along South Grand, where Vietnamese businesses are dominant, warning the public that such places were hang-outs of Asian gang members and were dangerous. No follow-up on the successful campaign against these gang members was ever carried out and reported. Fourth, while people were usually very positive about local police officers, American law seems ineffective and weak. It does not act with quick and certain punishment for illegal behavior and, therefore, it does not provide a deterrent to crimes. As a result of this, the law does not protect the victim from potential criminal reprisals if crimes are reported. Fifth, a few people questioned whether government regulations are used to interfere with their businesses. In other words, there is a sense that the non-Asian-American community is not supportive of their business endeavors and of their very struggle for survival.

## SUMMARY OF SUGGESTIONS BY THOSE INTERVIEWED

The primary goal of this investigation was to determine the needs of the local Asian business owners concerning issues of safety and crime. Clearly, these issues are complex and require a multiple set of approaches in resolving current problems and preventing future ones. Not the least element which needs to be considered is the total context in which these businesses exist. This context includes the community. The community referred to here entails both the larger heterogeneous American community and the more delimited intraethnic community. Without taking the community into account, as these interviews demonstrated, there can be no security for individual businesses. The essential requirements of a community involve: 1) ability to predict its members' behavior, 2) to maximize positive relationships and trust among and between individuals, families, and organizations, 3) to control the behavior of members, and 4) to effectively prepare its members for a place in the community through education. Working in partnership the larger American society and the intraethnic communities, specifically the Vietnamese community in this instance, must address the issue of crime and safety together.

The following items, which are not in order or priority or importance, recognize this interdependency. They are derived from concerns expressed or suggestions made by one or more of the people interviewed. The potential strategies are divided into two groups: 1) observations made by Asian business people (one or more) themselves, and 2) observations and strategies of the project itself.

### *ASIAN BUSINESS OWNERS' STRATEGIES*

#### **LOCAL ENVIRONMENT**

- \* **Explain the judicial system: procedures, process, potential problems, and potential solutions.** Because the owners do not understand the system and feel powerless, they keep quiet. Therefore, it is important to explain how the police system works, such as what are the steps in an investigation and what occurs after someone has been arrested and arraigned. Let them know what problems they might have with the law (for example, people are quickly allowed back out on the streets) and how they are still in control through the police and the law. This judicial system needs to be explained using a variety of outlets, print media, lectures, one-on-one where necessary. The information also needs to be repeated periodically in these various outlets.

- \* **Alert sources in the mass media to successes in curbing gang issues on South Grand.** The Business Association and the International Institute should encourage the mass media to take another look at the South Grand business area, and especially those areas which were identified in past media as dangerous.

## **POLICE**

- \* **Initiate a program for the general Vietnamese community and other Asian communities to learn more about the function and structure of the city police and the judicial system.** This can be done through one-day informational gatherings with interpreters so that people can really ask questions and understand. It can also be done through the use of newsletters and other mass media targeted at the Vietnamese or Chinese audience. These articles, such as one which appeared recently in Mr. Sony Nguyen's newsletter, can tell people how and whom to contact as well as provide information about what is needed when there is a problem.
- \* **Target more members of the ethnic community to become involved in the Police Citizens Academy by developing a special format for limited English speaker participants.** The in depth education of ethnic participants on the workings of the police department will provide another avenue for members of the larger ethnic communities to gain a greater insight into law enforcement. Further, the ethnic participants will provide an opportunity for feedback to the police department from the community.
- \* **Increase patrolling the area by car, bicycle, and through walking.** Increase the area covered to incorporate the area further South. Also, extend the time periods when there are police officers on patrol to include sensitive time periods when there are likely to be more problems: the time between when the high school students get out of school and take their buses home, in the late afternoon, early evening during the winter when it is dark, and between 9:00 and 11:00 p.m. when the businesses are closing.
- \* **Increase and intensify personal contact between business owners and police.** Frequent, casual, one-on-one contact between the business people and the police officers will do two things: first, it establishes a personal relationship between the officer and the business person, thereby opening communication between them; second, frequent contact will confound criminals, who might be trying to control and monitor a particular business person's interactions. In this way, the business person will have an opportunity to safely pass on information if needed, that is, with less fear of reprisals.

- \* **Provide feedback to the victims whenever a police report is made.** Feedback is critical to developing a sense of process and to confirming the value of police involvement. Even if there is no conclusion that can be made, the victims should be contacted periodically and given an update on their incident. Alternately, a telephone number could be established for the victims to call regarding any questions they might have.
- \* **Consider establishing a police chaplain program using ethnically diverse chaplains, i.e., Vietnamese.** Tap into the resources available in the community and use one or more Vietnamese police chaplains to interface between the police and the local Vietnamese citizens. Not only would this provide language translation services at critical junctures, it would also provide immediate assessment of any culturally based problem and how possible solutions.

## **SELF-HELP**

- \* **Produce and translate written materials with personal and property safety guidelines for both home and business.** The Neighborhood Associations and the South Grand Business Association are concerned with issues of safety and crime. Nevertheless, some of the Asian business owners are not able to fully benefit from their activities due to a language barrier. The language barrier, real or imagined, results in limited participation by these owners in the organizations. Therefore, it would be helpful if the police would develop safety tips which would be translated into Vietnamese or Chinese and made available to them.
- \* **Implement a one-on-one program where a police officer gives suggestions for securing business and home properties.** A police officer, perhaps one who is already working the area, could stop into the various businesses and give them some ideas on how to secure their businesses. If the police came with a letter written in Vietnamese and Chinese saying who he or she was and why the officer had come, the rest of the interaction could be carried out in English with a demonstration of what should be done.
- \* **Counter the perception which people have that the police only care about larger, more serious crimes.** Let the people know that the police care about the small problems, and that it is important to report even small, seemingly inconsequential crimes (for example, an attempt at shop lifting, but where the owner stopped the person and retrieved the merchandise). Let people know the process, for example, that these small incidences help to build up a file on the area and who is a potential problem. That such information can be used for preventing future criminal activities.



- \* **Send a questionnaire to each Vietnamese residence and business asking about crimes such as burglaries, break-ins, vandalism, and street violence.** A mailed questionnaire assures privacy and confidentiality for the respondents. This would allow people to express what they know and, perhaps, what their own experience has been without their having to fear possible reprisals.

## COMMUNITY

- \* **Inform all new arrivals, and update present immigrant community, about immigration laws affecting people found guilty of certain crimes.** Potential trouble makers must realize that there are consequences for crimes committed. Inform people, when they first arrive in the United States, that according to the immigration law, if someone commits a felony or a murder that they can be deported or denied citizenship. Perhaps this information dissemination could be included in a general orientation program at the International Institute. People need to know that there are real consequences, because the threat of being deported may create a sense of fear in them and, therefore, act as a control on their behavior. Also, whenever anyone in any part of the country is found guilty of a crime and deported, his or her name, address and details of his or her story should be published. As one interviewee noted, such details of "real experience, real example" will "scare kids" into behaving.
- \* **Encourage more solidarity and communication among those within the Vietnamese community, tying together the business, residential and religious elements.** This can be done by either uniting the several factions which presently exist by making their common goal overseeing the young people more effectively and protecting its members at the same time, or by emphasizing the same goal a new, broader based Vietnamese organization could be developed.
- \* **Support the expression of diverse points of view from within the community through either one newspaper or, if that is not possible, through two complementary newspapers.** Recognizing that a newspaper cannot be set up for every group that develops within the Vietnamese community, it is nevertheless, important to investigate the possibility of allowing the present over-riding two divisions to be able to express themselves. If two newspapers are considered necessary and given support, they may be mailed in alternate months.

## GANGS

- \* **The FBI and local police authorities should:**

- ~ **Keep pressure on potential gang members and present gang members;**
  - ~ **Maintain high visibility** in area which deters illegal activity;
  - ~ **Maintain and expand on-going ties with the community** so that they know what is happening and the level of development for gang growth, deterioration and activity.
- \* Many interviewees believed that a strong approach to controlling potential gang behavior is through a combination of community involvement and overt vigilance by those in authority. The local government agencies and police authorities should:
- ~ **Provide overt surveillance on houses and apartments where gang members hang out;**
  - ~ **Encourage neighbors** to keep track of activities and file complaints through telephone and written communication. Assure confidentiality;
  - ~ **Arrest people for loitering** if there are too many people together in an area;
  - ~ **Keep pressure on landlords** to maintain their properties, by using such tools as the nuisance laws.
- \* At risk high school age youth:
- ~ **Encourage local businesses to hire young people for a limited number of hours per week.** Keep the hours limited so that the stress is put on school. For example, to keep their job the students must also go to "after school or weekend" schooling set up to help their particular educational problems.
  - ~ **Make use of the ready and willing pool of volunteers and their facilities to expand and create new programs.** For example, involve local Vietnamese resources which can be provided by people such as Kim Tran and Rev. Vo (Missouri Lutheran Synod) in developing a community outreach program. Both space and possibly personnel can be tapped to set up an adjunct educational

program for students to learn the basics of reading, writing and math.

- ~ **Use the carrot and stick approach in dealing with these young people and their groups.** First, confirm and acknowledge successes in dominant culture and in the Vietnamese subculture. For example, people can be recognized publicly through the Vietnamese newsletter for community service as well as for academic successes. Second, quickly act against illegal behavior or nuisance behavior that puts them or the community at risk of further problems. Watch those who are potential criminals, and let them know that they are being watched as a deterrent to illegal activities.
  
- ~ **Encourage the school district to establish an alternative program for illiterate and undereducated middle and high school age students, who are non-native English speakers.** Give these students an education that is commensurate with their education skills. Older students can enter a vocational program, allowing them to learn useful skills and English at the same time. Without a more flexible curriculum for these students they are at serious risk of dropping out and, perhaps, becoming involved with gang activity.

## **BUSINESS ASSOCIATIONS**

- \* **Facilitate the development of a metropolitan wide Vietnamese business association.** One dominant theme that came through the interviews is that the Vietnamese business owners would join a Vietnamese Business Association if there were one. There should be a liaison between the Vietnamese Business Association and the local business associations and the Neighborhood Associations. Many suggested that the best approach would be for the Vietnamese Association to be organized under the auspicious of the International Institute.
  
- \* **Translate materials sent to Asian-owned businesses into the owner's home language.** It would be helpful to those who do not read English very well if material sent out from the Business Association and Neighborhood Association were translated into Vietnamese and Chinese. While this may not be practical for every piece mailed out, for those items considered especially important, for example, regarding security, such materials should be translated.

- \* **Establish on-going personal communication with business owners to inform them and to get the owners' input on association issues.** If an issue important to all of the businesses is going to come up at an association meeting, one of the board members could call or preferably stop by the businesses to tell the owners what is happening and to get their opinions. It is easier to express one's opinion in a one-on-one situation rather than in a group, particularly if the speaker is uncomfortable with his or her English language ability. Such interaction may also heighten the level of rapport and encourage the ethnic business owners to come to the meetings and, perhaps, express their opinions in a more open setting.

### ***OBSERVATIONS OF THE PROJECT: POTENTIAL STRATEGIES***

- \* **Train police officers and 911 operators to develop special limited-English communication skills.** It is important to train such intermediaries as the 911 operators and police officer in hearing and understanding limited English speakers. Often, the problem is not that a non-native English speaker cannot use English, the problem is that the native English speakers are too inflexible in his or her willingness to understand English spoken with an accent.
- \* **Recognize the need for more materials and translations of those materials.** There are many types of materials needed, from the various associations and from the police. Funding should be sought to help support these groups in their interaction with the Asian community.
- \* **Establish cultural sensitivity training classes for those involved in multicultural organizations or settings.** This would help those who are intimidated and afraid to use English. Communication between and among groups is better served when members of each group recognize their own culturally based expectations.
- \* **Concentrate further effort on assessing and developing a bridge between the Asian business community and the larger business community.**
- \* **Develop additional activities and educational programs for refugee youth.** Many refugee youths are significantly undereducated and inappropriately socialized (due to war or to other circumstances in their country) when they come to the United States; therefore, they are particularly at-risk of dropping out of school or becoming involved in gang activity.
- \* **Seek funding for translations, additional policing and additional services by**

**each of the agencies involved.** In order for these recommended steps and services to be provided, it will be necessary in some cases to expand present activities or create new programs, therefore, the number of personnel hours involved will increase. To ensure continuity of programs and personnel, it may be necessary to find additional funding.

- \* **Recognize that there are insignificant existing funds to accomplish these goals.** Therefore, more funding is needed and should be sought out in order to implement these suggestions.
  
- \* **Implement in-depth ethnographic research studies of those issues most involved in determining security issues at present and in the future.** There are three critical areas to be investigated further: 1) the symbiotic relationship of Asian businesses with the Asian resident community and with the non-Asian community and how this relationship can be used to strengthen the community against crime; 2) the behavior and expectations of at-risk Asian youth and their families in order to determine what types of intervention would prevent these youth from becoming involved with crime; and 3) the dynamics between and among local, regional and out-of-state Asian gang members since this interrelationship would determine the level of response needed to deal with the gangs.